

Canal Warehouse  
North side of C & O Canal between Warehouse  
Alley & Wisconsin Avenue, entrance at 3222  
M Street, N.W.  
Washington (Georgetown)  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-144

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
87-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

## CANAL WAREHOUSE

HABS  
DC  
GE6  
87-

Location: North side of Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, between Warehouse Alley and Wisconsin Avenue (32nd St.)  
The entrance is at 3222 M Street N.W. (Georgetown) Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: D.C. Transit System, Inc.

Present Occupant: U.S. Government Defense Communications Agency, annex E.

Present Use: Communications center.

Statement of Significance: A remnant of a Georgetown tobacco warehouse, once a flourishing trade. The retaining wall on the south side is of unique appearance, with rustic stonework.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- a. The rear portion on the canal seems originally to have been a tobacco warehouse which unloaded directly into canal boats. Subsequently, other owners put it to various uses. The following information is supplied by the Commission of Fine Arts from the records of the Firemen's Insurance Co. of Washington and Georgetown (303 7th Street N.W.): Date of Policy: December 31, 1839, Reference Number 817, page 203. "\$4,000 on the 2 story brick building commonly known as 'the small Tobacco Warehouse' covered with slate now occupied by Richard B. Mason and others for the manufacture and storage of corn brooms, and the storage of the materials of which they are made, situated on the north side of the Canal between High [Wisconsin Ave.] and Market [Potomac] Streets in George Town, not adjoined by any other buildings."
- b. In the early 1850's it was used as stables for horse-drawn omnibuses, and continued in use as a storage warehouse and repair shop for public transportation vehicles until about 1963.

2. Date of erection: Prior to 1838, the date of the Firemen's Insurance Co. of Washington and Georgetown policy to Richard Mason, ref. no. 444, p. 99. (Essentially the same text as

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
87-

the policy quoted above.) The building in its present shape is clearly represented on the Albert Boschke map of the area, published in 1861 but drawn in 1857. (See also Records of the Columbia Historical Society, v. 27, p. 283 for information on Mr. Boschke and his map). This map was of great accuracy, with buildings drawn from actual field measurements.

3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc: None known.
5. Alterations and additions: The interior of the building has been completely transformed. Before being remodeled by the U. S. Government it had a modern poured concrete floor with mechanics' pits; these were all filled in and recovered in the remodeling. The 1903 Sanborn Insurance Atlas indicates: "Cement floor, iron roof truss." The canal facade shows numerous windows that were blocked up at some time.
6. Important old views: The warehouse is shown in the lithograph by A. Sachse & Co. of about 1883, entitled "The National Capital Washington, D.C." (Library of Congress).

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. "By 1854 the two largest [horse drawn omnibus] lines were the Citizens Line and the Union Line.... The Union Line was operated by John E. Reeside and Gilbert VanDerwerken. They had their stables in an old tobacco warehouse on M Street west of Wisconsin Avenue where the present M Street shops of the Capital Transit Company are located. The rear portion of the present building is said to be identical with a portion of this old warehouse." E.D. Merrill, president of the Capital Transit Company, in "Changing Fashions in Transportation," (CHS v. 48-49, (1949) p. 161.) Mr. VanDerwerken came to Washington about 1850 from New Jersey, where he had owned a factory that made stage coaches, railroad cars, and omnibuses.

2. Washington directories provide the following information about the building:

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| 1915-33 | Capital Traction Co. repair shop                 |
| 1935-62 | D. C. Transit System Inc. repair shop            |
| 1965    | vacant   |
| 1967    | U. S. Government Defense Communications Annex E. |

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
September, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The warehouse, which seems to be composed of three sections added at different times, has interesting fenestration on the south side. The structure has a unique rustic stonework retaining wall on the canal side.
2. Condition of fabric: The interior has been gutted and remodeled. The openings on the canal side have been mostly filled. The roof has a recent shingle covering; the brick walls are in good condition on the exterior.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The original building seems to have been only the rectangular section parallel to the canal, measuring about 338' x 75', clearly shown on the Boschke map of 1861. The wing connecting this portion to M Street is 89' wide and extends about 175' north of the older section; it is shown on the Sachse 1883 lithograph. A third addition since that date has filled in along Warehouse Alley to M Street. The canal facade is not completely straight, but bends slightly south at the east end to follow the line of the canal. The canal facade is in three sections, a central gabled bay, with a wing on either side. There are two stories above a high stone basement story without windows. The heavy stone retaining wall extends an additional 30' west (below Warehouse Alley) and 3' to the east.
2. Foundations: Brick to grade. Along the canal is a heavy stone retaining wall.
3. Wall construction: The south wall is of common bond red brick with header rows usually at every eighth course and has five pointed star shaped tie rod plates. The brick wall is built on top of a stone revetment approximately 35' high.
4. Framing: Load bearing walls.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: On the south side the warehouse rests atop a revetment of dark gray and bluish-gray stones in random range; the rough hewn surfaces project from a few inches to a foot. About 3/5 the way up the wall is a row of projecting squared stones, above which is a row of broken off planks, near the top of the revetment. These are probably the support brackets of a long loading

platform and the remains of its wooden roof. A smooth stone coping crowns the revetment. Spanning the canal from the top of the revetment are two metal bridges: one an open truss and the other enclosed.

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
87-

6. Chimneys: A variety of metal vent towers, a red brick chimney, and a round metal stack project above the roof line.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: In the south elevation (eastern end), there appear two large vertical rectangular openings filled with cinder blocks. The center section contains eight evenly spaced segmental arched openings which begin at the coping atop the revetment. These are also filled with cinder blocks.
  - b. Windows and shutters: No shutters. In the eastern section of the south elevation, the first and second floors have nine infilled segmental arch windows with stone sills. The infilling consists of concrete block and brick. The center section has three infilled segmental arched windows at the second floor level and a small louvered window under the apex. The western section has, on the east end, two small rectangular openings (now sealed up) at both the first and second floor levels. The remainder of the fenestration in this section is composed of five sets of two story recessed round arch openings with brick dados flanked by elongated two story segmental arch windows. All have cinder block infilling.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The east and west sections have east-west gable roofs. The center gable section has a north-south gable roof. All have shingle covering.
  - b. Cornices, eaves: The eaves of the east and west sections have squared sheet metal projecting gutters. The center gable section has metal flashing along the south edge.

C. Description of Interior:

This interior has been gutted and remodeled several times and nothing of any of the original structure is visible inside.

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
87-

- D. Site: The "tobacco warehouse" is incorporated in the rambling structure of the old Capital Traction Warehouse and forms the southern facade overlooking the Canal and its towpath. All parts but this southern side are surrounded by commercial activities. Across the canal is another brick 19th century warehouse thus giving this section of the canal an appearance very much as it was a century ago.

Prepared by William R. Gwin  
Student Assistant Architect  
National Park Service  
September, 1967  
and  
Daniel D. Reiff  
Architectural Historian  
The Commission of Fine Arts  
July, 1968